

the Epithet Romantic.

real ascendancy of imagination ; so that, though they must at times have been conscious of committing great excesses, yet they were on the whole wonderfully little insensible to the enormous extravagance of their fictions. They could drive on their career through monstrous absurdities of description and narration, without, apparently, any check from a sense of inconsistency, improbability, or impossibility; and with an air as if they really reckoned on being taken for the veritable describers of something that could exist or happen within the mundane system. And the general state of intellect of the age in which they lived seems to have been well fitted to allow them the utmost license. The irrationality of the romancers, and of the age, provoked the observing and powerful mind of Cervantes to expose it by means of a parallel and still more extravagant representation of the prevalence of imagination over reason, drawn in a ludicrous form, by which he rendered the folly palpable even to the sense of that age. From that time the delirium abated; the works which inspired its ravings have been blown away beyond the knowledge and curiosity of any but bibliomaniacs; and the fabrication of such is gone among the lost branches of manufacturing art.

Yet romance was in some form to be retained, as indispensable to the craving of the human mind for something more vivid, more elated, more wonderful, than the plain realities of life; as a kind of mental balloon, for mounting into the air from the ground of ordinary experience. To afford this extra-rational kind of luxury, it was requisite that the fictions should still partake, in a *limited degree*, of the quality of the earlier romance. The writers were not to be the *dupes* of wild fancy; they were not to feign marvels in such a manner as if they knew no better; they were not wholly to lose sight of the actual system of things, but to keep within *some* measures of relation and proportion to it; and yet they were required to disregard the strict laws of verisimilitude in shaping their inventions, and to magnify and diversify them with an indulgence of fancy very considerably beyond the bounds of probability. Without this their fictions would have lost what was regarded as the essential quality of romance.

If, therefore, the epithet Romantic, as now employed for description and censure of character, sentiments, and schemes, is **to** be understood as expressive of the quality